

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 13, 2024

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chairman  
Senate Agriculture Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman  
Ranking Member  
Senate Agriculture Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

American farmers and ranchers produce the highest quality beef products in the world. Consumers and producers across the nation recognize this fact and are in search of additional market integrity. Therefore, we believe it is past time to reinstate mandatory country of origin labeling (MCOOL) for beef. As the Senate Agriculture Committee develops a new Farm Bill, we believe it is necessary to work towards a feasible MCOOL solution.

For almost a century, U.S. trade law has required the majority of imported products to bear a country of origin label. Americans recognize the clear benefits of consumer labeling laws and regularly use this information when making important purchasing decisions. Yet as you know, a number of agricultural commodities have been excluded from country of origin labeling requirements. In response, a broad coalition of producer and consumer groups worked to incorporate retail-level MCOOL in the 2002 Farm Bill.

Following the successful implementation of MCOOL, producers and consumers enjoyed a short-lived period of marketplace transparency. This change applied the same country of origin labeling standards to beef as the majority of other consumer goods sold in America. Unfortunately, a coalition of large meatpacking companies and foreign beef interests worked to repeal MCOOL. After Canada and Mexico filed a dispute with the World Trade Organization (WTO), Congress officially rescinded the law in 2015.

Since the repeal of MCOOL, American cattle producers have experienced significant market fluctuations. Concurrently, the largest meat packers have realized immense profits through the use of forward contracting and formula-based sales. While cattle prices are currently on the rise, it is evident producers will again encounter market disruptions. As farmers and ranchers deal with a volatile market, it is imperative the federal government work to provide a level playing field. This can be achieved through supporting additional transparency in our beef labeling system.

Our American farmers and ranchers work hard to provide the safest and best tasting beef in the world. Producers of foreign beef should not receive an unfair advantage when engaging in our domestic markets, especially as our competitors do not always meet American animal health and consumer safety standards. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's recent "Product of the USA" final rulemaking is a step in the right direction, but there is more work to be done.

Without a reasonable solution to the MCOOL question, hardworking American farmers and ranchers will continue to be put at a disadvantage. It is our hope Congress will use the Farm Bill

to address this pressing issue. This would entail using the legislation to require U.S. trade leaders to develop a WTO compliant means of reimplementing MCOOL.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with you as we move closer to finalizing the upcoming Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. Michael Rounds". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a stylized "Rounds" that ends in a long, sweeping tail.

M. MICHAEL ROUNDS  
United States Senator